

PRESIDENT'S REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2011

R.J. EAGLEN

THIS is the last occasion on which I shall deliver my Presidential Review. I felt it would be appropriate, therefore, to reflect upon what the Society has accomplished in the last three years and the challenges I see as remaining. I use the word 'accomplished' in no sense as a boastful conceit. Such progress as the Society has made is largely due to those who have served as Officers and Council Members in my term as President. Apart from acknowledging later the help of those who retire at the end of this evening it would, however, be invidious to single out individuals for recognition and thanks. Suffice to say, the Officers and Members whom you have re-elected tonight to serve your new President, Dr Roger Bland, are all persons of outstanding capability and commitment.

Perhaps the biggest step the Society has taken during my three years is in greatly increasing use of the internet. We have set up our own web-site, having hitherto been generously hosted by the Fitzwilliam Museum. This has not only enabled us to continue our publically accessible site but also to set up a database for administering the Society, accessible only to the Membership Secretary, Secretary, Treasurer and the Web-site Officers. The scope for developing both sites further is an exciting prospect. As most of you will be aware, we are currently making all *BNJ*'s published since 1903 up to the last five years freely available to all internet users.

When I came into office the world had just been plunged into the so-called 'credit crunch'. It was therefore a priority to ensure that the Society continued to have a sound financial basis. After the initial shock it did seem, for a time, that the effects of the crisis might not be as doleful as feared. But, not surprisingly, it is proving less easy to recover from years of profligacy without the protracted pain of retrenchment. Nevertheless, the Society has so far weathered the economic storm with some success. Most significantly, this has been made possible by retaining membership numbers above the 600 mark, encouraged by keeping subscriptions unchanged. The last increase was in the year 2000. We have also added to revenues by increased advertising in the *Journal* and taking advantage of keener quotations for its publication. Decent returns on our deposit funds are more elusive, but interest income remains a useful contributor. Overheads, affected by the inexorable increase in distribution costs for the *Journal* and postal communication with members have, in the latter case, been significantly reduced by greater use of the internet. Over two-thirds of our members have accepted this form of communication and the Society is grateful, especially to overseas members.

In 2010 the net assets of the Society were about £189,000, compared with £178,000 in 2009. In 2011 a modest decline will arise owing to the cost of Special Publications, where breakeven on the outlay is not expected until later, and to the expense of digitising the *BNJ*'s. The substantial investment in this project, which handsomely meets the Society's charitable objectives, has been partly met by the generosity of members.

The bedrock of our Society is, of course, its lecture programme, the *BNJ*, Special Publications, the library and the award of medals and prizes. The programme and *BNJ* continue to be full of interest and creative input, with no signs of flagging. The joint Summer Meeting with the Royal Numismatic Society was organized by them for the first time this year, taking place at Cardiff under the rubric *The Value of Money*. Although the turnout was disappointing, the participants were treated to a stimulating and varied programme. Your President did, however, get into trouble for suggesting that museums were, on occasion, too ready to retain hoards instead of recording and releasing them. In September the Linecar lecture was given by the eminent Romanist, Dr Richard Reece, entitled 'Not lost forever; understanding Roman coin finds over the past fifty years.'¹

¹ Published above, pp. 8–28, as 'Roman Britain and its economy from coin finds'.

After ten years during which two Special Publications appeared, in this year alone three have been published: Derek Chick's *The Coinage of Offa and his Contemporaries*, Mark Blackburn's *Viking Coins and Currency in the British Isles*, supported by a grant from the Dorothea Coke Fund, and Rory Naismith's two volumes on *The Coinage of Southern England, 796–865*. This flurry of activity is set to continue with two more prospective publications: Churchill and Thomas's long awaited *Brussels Hoard and the Long Cross Coinage*, now imminent and, towards the end of 2012, Philip Attwood's *Diaries of Leonard Wyon, 1853–1867*.

There has been no shortage of worthy candidates for the Society's awards. Tonight you are voting on the award of the Sanford Saltus Medal, the distinguished and worthy nominees being Dr Martin Allen, Dr David Dykes and Harrington E. Manville. Earlier in 2011 Council awarded Rory Naismith with the Blunt Prize, designed to recognize and encourage younger numismatists.

As part of the drive to improve the efficient running of the Society, you have tonight agreed to changes in the By-Laws (see below, pp. 316–17). These are the culmination of a process begun by my predecessor and will hopefully now serve the needs of the Society for many years to come.

I have been particularly keen to find ways in which to improve communication with members and raise the profile of the Society. The Presidential Newsletter, introduced before my time, is an invaluable vehicle, especially for members who are not able to attend meetings at the Warburg Institute. The web-site is another, as is, in small measure, circulating more information on the lectures to be presented in the annual programme. Having a BNS stand at major coin fairs is also designed to increase awareness of the Society and canvas membership. I must confess, however, that the results so far have been mixed, and the reluctance of members to give up an hour of their time to man the stand is very disappointing. I had also wished to visit as many local numismatic societies as possible during my tenure but regrettably conflicting demands on my time have stood in the way. The end of term report on this aspiration reads: disappointing performance.

This evening Council says goodbye – at least for the time being – to our Librarian, John Roberts-Lewis, to William Mackay, our Publicity Officer and to Professor Norman Biggs and Major-General Adrian Lyons, both of whom served on Council and the Finance Committee. I would like to record my appreciation and thanks for the support they have given to me and to the Society. I would also like to thank Tony Merson who has again kindly agreed to continue as our Independent Examiner.

This brings me to the more sombre part of my review. In 2011 we have lost, through death, the following members: on 11 March Eileen Atkinson at the age of 79, a member since 1971, who generously bequeathed £1,000 to the Society in her will; on 6 June the Reverend Roderick Palmer at the age of 77, a member since 2001; on 6 July Nicholas Rhodes at the age of 65, a former Treasurer of the RNS and a member of this Society since 1961 and on 3 September David Griffiths at the age of 70, a member since 1979.

The loss of such friends and colleagues to the numismatic community is always a cause for sadness and regret, but none more so than the death of our former President and Sanford Saltus Medallist, Dr Mark Blackburn, who succumbed to cancer on 1 September 2011 after a courageous battle spanning more than two decades. His contribution to our world is immeasurable, as an inventive and dynamic President of the Society, as an outstanding Keeper of Coins and Medals at the Fitzwilliam Museum, as the author or co-author of numerous works of lasting numismatic and historical importance and as the long-term General Editor of the British *Sylloge* series. Just as he was inspired by the previous generation of numismatists he passed on with charm and grace his own scholarly standards and zeal to a new generation now bearing fruit. We must be thankful for his unsurpassed contribution to British numismatics but cannot feel other than regret that, at the age of 58, he has been taken from us in his prime. There will be an obituary for Mark in the forthcoming Journal.²

To end on a happier note, I wish my successor, Dr Roger Bland, an enjoyable tenure. I have no need to wish him success. Roger and I have spoken at length and he will obviously have his

² *BNJ* 81 (2011), 300–3.

own agenda. However, one key area where I have not made the progress I had hoped is in that of education. By that I mean stimulating a wider interest in and understanding of numismatics amongst the public and, particularly, younger persons. We both agree this is a worthy but not an easy challenge. If the Society can rise to it the potential benefits could be immense.

The President then delivered the second part of his address, 'What is the point of Numismatics?', printed at pages 203–9 above.